"THE HORROR STORY OF KRIEGIE 7310"

This story begins on the 16th of December, 1944, the day the Germans jumped off across the Sauer River on their last desperate counter-offensive into Luxembourg and Belgium. Since a month before D-Day I had been flying ground support missions for Patton's Third Army across France and at the time of the Ardennes break-through we were based at field A-80, a dozen miles east of Reims. The famous 101st Airborne Division, veterans of parachute landings in Normandy and Holland were quartered in barracks on our field, regrouping for an early return to the States.

Missions on Saturday, the 16th, hit German tank concentrations, but it was late Sunday before we realized the seriousness of the situation. The 101st was alerted that evening and all day Monday their cub pilots were dropping in at our Intelligence Room to get maps of the area, totally new to them.

I flew my last mission before the 23rd on Monday, the 18th, for the weather closed in solid on Tuesday, the 19th, and there was no flying through Friday, at a time when air support was so desperately needed to help break up the fast moving advance across northern Luxembourg to Bastogne, Stavelot, Malmedy, and near Liege in Belgium.

After lunch on Tuesday, when I realized that there would be no more flying that day, I hitch-hiked to Paris in the rain with a 48 hour pass through Thursday and another one lined up for Friday and Saturday. I hit town around six that evening to find Charles' hotel room, which he had tentatively left me for three months while he toured the Midi, now occupied by a British civilian stenographer. I extracted my reserve dress uniform, which I had gotten in the habit of leaving in town, and procured a spare bed from the PWD billeting officer, who was an old friend by now.

Wednesday I rendez-voused with Colette as usual at 10:30 before la Madelaine and although I forget the details, I imagine we shopped, walked, danced, and dined as usual.

Thursday I checked at the Red Cross hotel for officers and found out from the other boys in the squadron on pass that all leaves were cancelled and that there would be no truck out to the field on Saturday. The weather was still bad and I hadn't missed a thing, so I decided to risk another day and hitch-hike out on Friday, for Thursday, the 21st, was Colette's birthday and she had a party planned that night and neither of us wanted me to miss it. We had a good evening with about twenty odd gals and boys, all French friends of Colette's. We had a buffet-supper and danced all evening at the apartment of Colette's family out in Neuilly.

Next morning we met again for a couple of hours before I doffed my dress regalia and donned hiking clothes. I caught a subway to the edge of town soon after lunch and eventually hopped a big truck to Reims and later to the field after dark.

Still no missions flown in four days, but "Stormy", the weatherman, had hopes for the morrow. I read all the teletypes for the week,

brushing up on the news and put myself up on the squadron mission board to lead the cover flight on the morning mission.

That evening Jonesy and I dropped in at the enlisted men's bar for a few beers and pieces of cake on invitation and wound up back in our room over a piece of fruit cake and some Christmas candy. I read a chapter or two of "Yankee from Olympus" and we doused the light.

Saturday, December 23rd, was definitely clear compared to the past four days and we knew there'd be big things doing. We were up at seven, over to Group Intelligence for the briefing of squadron and flight leaders, a few minutes for breakfast, pancakes and fried eggs, and then to the Squadron Briefing room before piling into jeeps with maps, 'chutes and helmets and off to the flight line, with ten minutes before start-engine time, ten more minutes to taxi out for take-off at 0830 and ten minutes to form up over the field before setting course 085 degrees for Trier.

Our mission was an armed recce (reconnaissance) within the triangle Trier-Bitburg-Bastogne, with special attention to be paid to pontoon bridges across the Sauer. We had twelve ships in the squadron, each loaded with a 500 lb. bomb under each wing and a cluster of fragmentation bombs on the belly rack. Even the cover flight was loaded, a new experiment, for every pound of explosive was needed out there.

Jonesy was leading the squadron as Red Flight Leader and I was leading Yellow Flight for top cover, four planes to a flight. The other four ships made up Blue Flight and were alongside Red Flight a couple of thousand feet below me. The two other squadrons in the group based on our field had similar missions with one of them escorting C-47's to Bastogne to drop supplies to the now-encircled 101st.

We flew out over World War I No-Man's-Land from Reims to Verdun, across the Argonne Forest, the Meuse, and dead over Luxembourg City to reach the Moselle at Trier. We circled the city just out of flak range as German 88's tried to reach us and spotted trains in the valley east of town. Jonesy started down with his flight while Blue Flight circled and we covered them both at eight thousand feet. The bombs had burst from the dive-bombing runs of Jonesy's flight and he was about to go in on a strafing pass when I spotted "beaucoup bogies" (unidentified aircraft) to the NE and several thousand feet above.

I started up in a wide sweeping turn to gain altitude and to close our range sufficiently to identify them. They were headed our way and when they dropped their external fuel tanks, I knew they were bandits (enemy aircraft). I called Jones on the radio and told him to forget the targets below and get on up, we were in for a fight. I told everyone in the squadron to jettison all bombs and external tanks not yet dropped, and as the first flight of Jerries headed down toward the boys on the deck, I started in to break up the enemy fighters directly ahead and slightly above me. There were at least eight to ten more lazily circling well above us, making a total of at least twenty.

I had the number four man of a Jerry flight in my sights and was about to fire, when an ME-109 flashed by directly over my canopy, black crosses distinctly visible beneath each wing. Almost simultaneously

there was a loud bang and a flash of flame filled the cockpit. A 20 mm. shell from one of his cannon had evidently made a direct hit on my main fuel tank directly beneath my seat and the latter had exploded. Reflex action made me close my eyes, my colored goggles were on my forehead, although my oxygen mask covered most of my face. Without needing to think or plan or decide, my training, experience, and will-to-live made my right hand grab for the emergency canopy release directly overhead and my left hand for the safety belt release across my stomach. In a fraction of a second the entire bubble canopy was gone and I was falling out of the cockpit, half pushed by fire and thrashing legs and half pulled by the two hundred mile-an-hour slipstream. Before my mind started working again, I was falling clear of the plane and reached for the ripcord on my chest. The blessed thing worked and the happiest moment of my life was then, as I looked up and saw that great canopy overhead gently letting me down to earth. All too gently, however, I soon realized, for the dogfight was still all around me, and Jerry planes filled the air as I drifted downward for five minutes, 0945 it was by my watch, nine months to the day after I pulled out of New York harbor, and six months to the day before I was to board the Queen Elisabeth at Glascow, homeward-bound.

I had time to look the countryside over as I drifted down and saw that I would land in a hilly, snow-laden forest a dozen miles NE of Trier and a few miles north of the Moselle. I saw a couple of 47's down at least one Jerry plane and sweated out a ME-109 that looked as though he were contemplating making a pass at me. He circled at a hundred yards and held fire, while I breathed more easily. The earth came up gradually at first, but at the end of my fall, the trees seemed to rush at me and presently I slid down through some tall firs and touched the ground lightly as my parachute caught on the branches overhead.

My first instinct was to run, lest I be captured immediately, but I soon realized I was too deep in the forest to have been spotted. Heading west, I crossed several ravines until I met a main tributary to the Moselle with rail and road traffic paralleling the stream. Working south through the woods just out of sight, I reached the Moselle by the middle of the afternoon, but found it full of great blocks of ice in a rushing current. All roads and bridges were obviously well-guarded, so I headed north again, hoping by nightfall to find a place to ford the smaller stream and work west.

By six it was dark and very cold and I descended to the road to find a crossing. Remember that I was in Germany proper at the time, where there is no underground, and that I was "behind the Bulge". The Germans were making better time in their advance to the West than I was. During my search for a crossing a German soldier hailed me, and my game was up. Frozen feet would have been the only gain in fording the stream, and fifty miles without food or shelter would have been an impossibility even if what was left of the Wehrmacht had not stood between me and the disorganized American lines.

The soldier took me in to the nearest village and turned me over to the officer in charge of the local garrison. He in turn searched me and asked a few questions and promised medical treatment for my eyes, which were now almost closed from swelling and were without eyebrows and eyelids. The eyeballs themselves were untouched luckily, and in a month

my face was back to normal. Minor burns around my wrists, where my gloves failed to reach my sleeves, up my pant legs, and on my ear healed rapidly. In all my time in German military hands I was never pushed around or mishandled. Mistreatment consisted entirely of an inadequate food ration, bad living conditions and illegal solitary confinement for interrogation purposes. That night I was locked and barred in a farmhouse room with a blanket and some straw on the floor. The lady of the house brought in a bit of hot milk soup and some cooked potatoes and cabbage, a definite boost to my morale, which dropped again as I tried to sleep to the thump of the guard's boots outside and the whistling of a bitter winter wind.

The next morning, they started me off on my German ration, which amounted to a sixth of a loaf of "Kriegsbrot" a day with an occasional chunk of ersatz baloney and a cup or two of burned-barley coffee.

That afternoon I was joined by an Armored Division lieutenant named Lutkehaus, who was particularly bitter about his nickname, "Lucky". From him I heard the first of an endless line of "Horror Stories", the individual PW's answer to the question of a fellow PW, "What the hell are you doing here?" This whole account is my "horror story".

Christmas Eve "Lucky", eight GI's captured with him, and myself were taken by a truck, a fortunate break, twenty miles to Wittlich, heavily bombed that day by B-26's, making 2,000 homeless. We were taken to a great, heavily barred county jail on the edge of town where a thousand or more other newly captured Americans were awaiting transport out of the battle zone. Many more came in daily, but rail facilities to the Rhine and beyond were demolished. Eventually most of these men marched eastward.

We spent four days there, sleeping on the floor most of the time and working on rubble heaps in town all one day, with the payment of a steel helmet full of hot cabbage water per seven men when we got back. One day the guards called for all Air Force personnel and three of us spoke up with wonder in our minds and fear in our hearts. Actually it turned out to be a lucky break, for we joined a dozen other fliers and their five Luftwaffe guards and started off for the Interrogation Center near Frankfort on our own. We caught trains when and where there were any, hitch-hiked into Coblenz, walked many miles, half-carrying two flak-wounded boys, and reached Oberursel, near Frankfort, just before New Year's Day.

There we were each popped into a little cell, 5 x 10, and of ordinary height. There was a wooden bed with a loosely filled sack of straw for a mattress, one blanket, a glazed window to let in light, and nothing else but beaverboarded walls, not even a doorknob or hinges. The blackout shutters were closed from five in the afternoon until eight in the morning, leaving the room in total darkness for fifteen hours. The only break in the day came at meal time when guards opened your door long enough to push in two slices of bread and ersatz coffee for breakfast and supper and a bowl of grass-like soup for lunch.

The first interrogation is short, for everyone refuses to give more than his name, rank, and serial number. After three days or so in solitary, the airman is taken to an interrogator's office, which is

intentionally overheated to make one feel drowsy and at ease. Cigarettes are offered, and the interrogator chats along in perfect English, first joking and kidding, then threatening. Leading questions are asked and every bit of information previously accumulated is used to make you think that there's no harm in talking. Eventually, if they become convinced you have no special information or if the "sweatboxes" are filling up too fast, they clear you as a recognized POW and ship you on to Dulagluft at Wetzlar, in a little over a week in my case. Others spent up to thirty days in solitary, if they were considered valuable as sources of information and refused to talk.

The two-day train ride to Wetzlar was comparative bliss, for we could talk with Americans again, and on our arrival there we got our first shower in two grimmy weeks and our first Red Cross food. It was there we were issued GI clothing brought in by the Red Cross, a shirt, shoes if needed, two sets of winter underwear, a GI blouse, a sweater (knitted by the Atlanta Chapter), and some toilet articles, all of which made life many times more bearable in the months to come. We stayed there only one night before being piled into a troop train for a four-day ride to Barth, Stalagluft I, 90 miles north of Berlin, 60 miles south of Sweden across the Baltic. We arrived in a driving snowstorm, two years to the day after I reached Nashville as a cadet still in civilian clothes.

Stalagluft I was primarily a prison camp for commissioned Allied airmen. There were RAF personnel there who had been shot down 3 Sept. 1939 and nine thousand others lost in the Battle of Britain, on heavy raids over Germany, flying ground support in Italy, France and the Low Countries, and even a naval cadet shot down by a German sub in the Gulf of Mexico.

The camp was divided into four compounds of approximately two thousand men in each, with little or no communicating between compounds. My compound was the latest and last and had ten barracks forming a rectangle where we stood roll call and played soft ball. A hard drive could cross the open space diagonally. Around the barracks and just inside the warning wire, a walk was soon worn down, roughly one hundred yards to a side. This, then, was where I was to sweat out the war with some 2,300 other "Krieges" (from Kriegsgefangene = POW). My barracks had ten rooms, twenty-four men to a room, 20' by 25'. Along one whole side three tiers of wooden beds took care of eighteen of us, while six more were in one of the remaining corners and an inefficient tile stove in the other. A window faced the door and there was a table and a couple of benches to accommodate eight in front of it. We tipped two closets on their sides for kitchen tables and lockers and used them to block off the stove corner for a kitchen. The 24 men we divided into two shifts or combines for eating purposes, each combine deciding on its own methods of selecting a cook, a KP, and of determining how to prepare and ration what food we got.

At first Red Cross parcels were still arriving with some regularity, and this eleven pound food parcel issued each man every week was sufficient to carry a man along comfortably, if not strictly according to Army diet regulations. The arrival of new parcels soon ceased due to transport difficulties and the warehouse reserve was gone by the middle of February. For six weeks we lived solely on the German ration of a bowl of soup a day and a loaf of bread apiece each week. Enthus-

iasm for softball and even reading lessened and when the thaws came in March it was impossible even to walk around the compound. For as much as three days you wouldn't leave the barracks at all and on the coldest of days it was necessary to stay wrapped up in blankets to keep warm. The coal ration diminished and even the food was due to become scarcer. Rumors spread of reprisals for the great Dresden raid which killed 18,000 civilians, and plans were reported to evacuate all captains and above as hostages to Southern Germany. There was little to do except talk and hope.

The one bright moment of the day was the "POW-WOW", the secret newspaper with all the latest BBC news. Its source was always a mystery to us, but its value in morale was immeasurable. We all became ardent commentators on the news and the pins in our maps were being moved constantly. The Russian drive from Warsaw started soon after I reached camp, but ran out just 90 miles away on the Oder in February. Our lighting system powered from Stettin went out at that time and our hopes for liberation were high. Montgomery's drive in Holland came soon after, though, and soon Patton was across the Rhine and we knew it couldn't be more than a couple of months.

Holy Week, 1945, was the turning point for the "Kriegies" of Stalag I. News of Remagen came on the 23rd of March, followed by four days of the best weather in camp. We sun-bathed all the time and those with energy enough got up ball games while the other two thousand watched.

On Tuesday the rumors about more parcels arriving got out of control as a batch of personal mail came in. We were too used to disappointments to believe the latest reports, but suddenly the familiar horse-drawn wagons rolled up to the gate loaded with Red Cross parcels, real food again. We were too mindful of past hunger to dare use it fast, but by the end of the week there were 90,000 parcels in camp and a confirmed report of a million more in Lubeck and two million in Sweden, our new source of supply.

Easter we celebrated -- good food, good news, and a good God. Easter Monday we were all sick, violently sick all over the place. It was inevitable with our eyes so much bigger than our stomachs, but there were no casualties of more than a week.

All through April we followed the news day by day and made bets on when and how the end would come for us. The build-up was gradual but sure and by the end of the month we could hear the guns as the Russians moved over the Oder to Berlin and on toward the Western Allies, with our camp at the uppermost tip of the intervening corridor.

On Sunday, April 29th, there was a sudden flurry of air activity at the neighboring airfield and on Monday reports of evacuation came through. The Germans were leaving, but Col. Zemke, the Senior Allied Officer in camp, refused to allow his men to be moved. It was a daring chance to take, but the German Commandant wished no blood on his hands, so he turned the camp over to the Americans and left with his men.

On Tuesday, May 1, we awoke to find our own men appointed as MP's in all the towers. We were now in No-Man's-Land with the unknown Russians rapidly advancing. That day Zemke sent out patrols to contact

the Russians and the first tank reached camp that night. On Wednesday, as the main tank force dashed Westward to meet the British at Weimar, a strange, guerilla-like force spread over the land. According to evacuation plans, we were hurriedly ordered to prepare to leave for Odessa in six hours. The Russian lieutenant-colonel hardly realized the problem he had run up against, and Zemke in order to prevent such a foolhardy move and to placate these wild Russians, who seemed disappointed to find us still meekly, though wisely, behind barbwire, let it be known that we might now bust out of camp. For a day or two there was little discipline left as many Americans joined the Russians in drunken, riotous, looting of warehouses, farms, and stores in Barth.

Eventually order arrived as General Borisoff came into the area to set up military law and the "Kriegies" trickled back into camp to await transportation. Marshall Rokosovsky himself stopped by to see us on his way to meet Montgomery after the surrender at Luneberg Heath on Friday the fifth. The Russians did everything in their individual power to see that we were well fed and amused, but it was not in their power to get us out, which was our only desire. That was a job for Moscow to arrange and they demanded complete passport information on every man to be repatriated -- all in Russian.

In the meantime we listened to BBC reports of V-E Day and still we waited to leave. Some 2,000 left of their own accord, but the rest stayed on, hopeful that past promises to us would be kept. It was not until Sunday, May 13, that we were speedily and efficiently flown to France by Eighth Air Force B-17's. That night we ate at our first GI mess near Reims, only a mile or so from where my last mission had started. The next morning we were flown to Le Havre and our hopes for immediate shipment zoomed. For three weeks, however, I lay about the great tent city of Camp Lucky Strike near St. Valery, constantly believing and being told that we would ship out in a few days. We were without money or decent clothes, but home was the only thing we longed for.

It soon became obvious, however, that the whole business was SNAFU as far as we were concerned, for we were the last of 90,000 POW's to come through there out of Germany. Our top priority had disappeared on R-(for Redeployment)Day and there was not any shipping in Le Havre anyway.

Despairing of ever leaving that dusty camp of boredom, I got orders to go to England for transportation to the States with a seven day delay en route. I hitch-hiked into Paris to find I had missed Charles by three days and John by about two weeks. Had I known they were there, I could easily have joined them for a three-way reunion.

After a couple of days seeing Paris in Spring with Colette, I flew to Frankfort for a short visit with Charles and then to London to await further orders. After a few days of farewell there, I reported to Southampton for shipment, which obviously was not forthcoming, so I basked on the Bournemouth beaches for a week until went stone broke. A hurried visit to London stabilized my finances.

We soon left Southampton, though, by train for Glascow and boarded the Queen Elisabeth with a couple of hundred PW's and 15,000 GI's.